UNITED
NATIONS

E

Economic and Social Council

Distr.
GENERAL

E/ICEF/1993/2 (Part I)
2 March 1993

ORIGINAL: ENGLISH

UNITED NATIONS CHILDREN'S FUND
Executive Board
1993 session

FOR INFORMATION

REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

SUMMARY

Widespread ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Rights of the Child and completion by 75 countries of national programmes of action to achieve the goals of the World Summit for Children, with some 60 more in preparation, are but two of the indications that public attitudes towards children's issues are changing in important ways. Emergency situations in many countries are affecting children, but the world must not lose sight of the bigger challenge of the 35,000 child deaths caused every day by largely preventable causes, nor of the opportunities afforded by advances in knowledge, modern communications and growing political will.

Against this background, the 1993 Executive Board will meet to consider the UNICEF response to new and continuing emergencies, 44 various country programme recommendations, the proposed administrative and support budget for the 1994-1995 biennium and the implementation of General Assembly resolution 47/199 of 22 December 1992. Underlying these matters, however, are the challenges of achieving the goals for children in the 1990s adopted by the Board in 1990 and of mobilizing the needed resources. Neither the goals nor the required resources are beyond reasonable expectation, as explained in the present report, but the support of Executive Board members, both collectively and individually, will be crucial.

CONTENTS

		Paragraphs	Page
I.	CHANGING PUBLIC ATTITUDES TOWARDS CHILDREN	1 - 5	2
II.	THE VISIBLE TROUBLE SPOTS	6 - 8	3
III.	PROGRAMME-RELATED ISSUES	9 - 14	3
IV.	MANAGEMENT ISSUES	15 - 17	5
V.	THE EXECUTIVE BOARD AND ADVOCACY FOR CHILDREN	18	6

93-11874 (E) 310393 020493

/...

capacity of the media to bring knowledge and the power it provides even to the remotest village, are all marvellous opportunities. Failure to seize these opportunities would indeed be a failure of vision and of leadership.

II. THE VISIBLE TROUBLE SPOTS

6. This momentum for children is both threatened and abetted by world events. The threats are all too obvious in the daily headlines and images from the world's trouble spots, in increasing national, racial, ethnic and religious conflicts. But a new global conscience is also in the making, one that, however hesitantly and not without self-interest, is finally reacting to the horror of the headlines and images. Although all too often it seems that people must see the rights of children being violated before their eyes before they decide to do something to confirm and champion those rights, children's rights are now on the public agenda as never before. The world must be made aware of all that has been achieved for children in recent decades and be convinced that the majority of the starving and traumatized children seen on television can be helped through a perfectly feasible programme of action. That programme will capitalize on a synergistic combination of recent advances in knowledge, new means of communication and mobilization that are now so readily available and of growing political will.

7. UNICEF cannot ignore the "loud" emergencies, as indeed it has not - 20 per cent of UNICEF expenditures in 1992 were devoted to emergency programmes, and four staff members lost their lives in the service of children in emergency situations last year - but the larger challenge for UNICEF and the United Nations, is to make the response to the "loud" emergencies an occasion for sustaining the drive against the still more horrible forces of poverty, ignorance and disease that take the lives of 35,000 children every day. Some 1,000 deaths a day, mostly of children, finally brought about the recent massive intervention in Somalia. The action in Somalia was an unprecedented indication that world public opinion recognizes the need to defend children's and families' right to food. The evolving role of the United Nations from peace-keeping to peacemaking is a sign of changing public attitudes towards humanitarian concerns.

8. A major challenge facing the Executive Board in 1993 and of our time is how to mobilize a comparable level of concern for the now readily preventable "silent" emergencies, in which diarrhoea, vaccine-preventable diseases and acute respiratory infections each take the lives of more than 5,000 children daily.

III. PROGRAMME-RELATED ISSUES

9. The 1992 session of the Executive Board took place immediately after the United Nations Conference on Environment and Development. By including the goals of the World Summit for Children in Agenda 21, the Conference made the pursuit of those goals part of the world-wide movement to achieve sustainable development, according a "first call" to tomorrow's children in the use of the earth's finite resources. The full implications for children and for UNICEF of the Conference will take years to assess and develop, but at this session, the Executive Board has before it a policy paper on children and the

environment (E/ICEF/1993/L.2) and a related one on the urban poor (E/ICEF/1993/L.9) that seek to apply at least some of the Conference's implications to the work of UNICEF.

10. Although it is less than one year since the Executive Board last met, there is a full agenda for its consideration and counsel. The Board will naturally be concerned with the nature and extent of the UNICEF response to new and continuing emergencies in Somalia, the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Angola, Liberia, the Sudan, Afghanistan, Central Asia and elsewhere. But as it reflects on these crises, the Board will have some 44 country programme recommendations to approve, in addition to the 1992-1993 revised and 1994-1995 proposed administrative and programme support budget (E/ICEF/1993/P/L.3). Underlying all its considerations are the formidable challenges of the goals for children in the 1990s which the Board itself adopted in 1990, and of the support needed by each country to achieve the goals of its own NPA.

11. In the course of developing NPAs and during regional consultations, countries have found it necessary and useful to formulate intermediate goals. The UNICEF/World Health Organization Joint Committee on Health Policy has also endorsed the concept of intermediate goals. Achieving goals by mid-decade and by the end of the decade will require resources - more resources than are now being put to work for children's priority concerns, but not such a great amount as to be out of the question. The world must not forget that it is possible and affordable to provide virtually every household with adequate food, clean water, safe sanitation, primary health care, family planning and basic education by the end of the century. UNICEF has estimated that the additional resources needed to achieve this would total approximately $25 billion per year, two thirds from the developing countries and one third from the industrialized countries. If Governments of developing countries restructured their budgets so as to assure at least 20 per cent for social sector needs, and if donors restructured official development assistance (ODA) to assure a similar 20 per cent for human priority concerns, the world would be close to providing the needed $25 billion. This target is not an impossibility and was agreed to by the participants at the Organization of African Unity's International Conference on Assistance to the African Child (ICAAC). At the Conference, held in Dakar, Senegal, in November 1992, both donor and recipient countries pledged to strive for that goal by 1995.

12. While maintaining the conviction that this target is feasible, the Executive Director wishes to call the Executive Board's attention to some areas of special concern. The hope for this "20/20 vision", as it is being called, assumes that current levels of ODA will be substantially increased or restructured. It is a matter of considerable preoccupation, then, that some countries that have traditionally maintained ODA at or near to recommended levels have found it necessary to reduce these levels as a result of severe economic pressure. UNICEF can only hope that these measures are strictly temporary and will not be imitated by other donors. The principle of a "first call for children", endorsed by the World Summit for Children and which maintains that the essential needs of children should be given high priority in the allocation of national and international resources in bad as well as in good times, is particularly relevant when Governments must make difficult choices regarding the allocation of resources.

13. Another matter for concern is the continuing and still increasing external debt of African countries. In sub-Saharan Africa, external debt now exceeds the combined gross national product of the countries in the region and is proportionally several times heavier than Latin America's debt. For the most part, this is official, not commercial debt. African Governments demonstrated at ICAAC the seriousness of their commitment to the reforms being demanded of them and their willingness to link debt relief with additional support for programmes to meet priority human needs. Ways must be found to relieve this burden which, together with the continuing decline in commodity prices, is smothering the hope for recovery in many African countries. Finding ways to alleviate Africa's debt burden - and in the process to liberate some resources for investment in human development priorities - should not be beyond the capacity of the international community, including the international financial institutions. This subject merits a place on the agenda of the next summit of the "group of seven" industrialized countries.

14. The world also still needs to achieve a breakthrough in the areas of basic education and literacy. The importance of basic education for economic growth is now recognized everywhere and the international financial institutions are increasing dramatically their lending for education. Curriculum reform and other structural changes are on the agenda in many countries there are promising models, but large-scale change has yet to take place. A new initiative involving the nine countries with the largest child populations is being supported by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization and UNICEF; if the education goals of the World Conference on Education for All and the World Summit for Children are to be achieved, this initiative must succeed.

IV. MANAGEMENT ISSUES

15. Three major management issues will require Executive Board consideration during its 1993 session. The most immediate is that of the 1992-1993 revised and 1994-1995 proposed administrative and programme support budgets (E/ICEF/1993/AB/L.1). Because of the work of the budget format reference group last year, questions of transparency that had been raised about previous budgets should be largely resolved. The proposed 1994-1995 budget is characterized by a modest reduction in headquarters personnel and small corresponding increases in staff at field levels, continuing and strengthening the UNICEF presence at subnational levels and the incorporation of a larger number of national Professional officers in its field teams. While income for 1992 surpassed $900 million, well ahead of the projections of the medium-term plan, the current outlook for 1993 is less hopeful due to the strengthening of the United States dollar and the above-mentioned cut-backs in ODA by certain countries. Prospects for an upturn in UNICEF income for the 1994-1995 biennium will depend in part on whether donor countries accept and implement the recommendation first enunciated in the United Nations Development Programme Human Development Report 1992, supported by UNICEF and specifically noted at ICAAC, that the portion of ODA devoted to human priority concerns be increased from its current estimated 10 per cent to 20 per cent, and that UNICEF, along with other organizations devoted to these concerns, would be one of the channels for transmittal of such an increase.

16. A second item for consideration is the implementation of General Assembly resolution 47/199 of 22 December 1992 on the operational activities for development of the United Nations system. The Executive Director welcomes this resolution wholeheartedly and believes that UNICEF should support its prompt and systematic implementation. How best to collaborate with Governments and the resident coordinator in the preparation of the country strategy note referred to in resolution 47/199 and how to accelerate the move towards common premises are among the issues that will require and have the concerted attention of UNICEF in 1993 and beyond.

17. Another subject on which Board members might wish to comment is the recent evaluation of UNICEF. The executive summary of the synthesis report of the evaluation (E/ICEF/1993/CRP.7) and the Executive Director's comments on the evaluation will be available to the Executive Board (E/ICEF/1993/CRP.8).

V. THE EXECUTIVE BOARD AND ADVOCACY FOR CHILDREN

18. Finally, the Executive Director requests the assistance of the Executive Board in the task of advocacy on behalf of children. Members of the Board are also members of governing bodies of other United Nations agencies and/or officials of development institutions. The goals supported by UNICEF are often identical with and always complementary to the goals of other United Nations bodies and donor institutions. What is needed at this point in history is a broad understanding of how goals for children complement so many other human objectives. They are a major contribution to a better environment, including the reduction of population growth; the promotion of children's rights is part of the movement for democracy and human rights; the goals for children are empowering to women; and the achievement of health, education, water supply and sanitation and adequate nutrition for all would go a long way towards eliminating the worst aspects of poverty and contribute to economic growth. UNICEF has consistently maintained that focusing on common goals and shared strategies is the key to inter-agency cooperation. For this to be effective, however, all parties concerned must be truly convinced that the goals endorsed by the Executive Board and the World Summit for Children are feasible, and have the will and the vision to work together to achieve them.